



MARC, INC. OF MANCHESTER  
151 SHELDON ROAD  
MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT  
06042

860-646-5718  
FAX 860-645-9910

KEVIN ZINGLER  
PRESIDENT & CEO

February 24, 2022

**H.B. 05037 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING  
JUNE 30, 2023 - (Department of Developmental Services)**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Kevin Zingler, President & CEO of MARC, Inc. of Manchester, a nonprofit organization that provides Day, Residential, Respite, Personal Supports, Supported Employment, and Transportation Services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

As a partner with the Development of Developmental Services (DDS) for the past 70 years, I am here to respectfully request that the legislature appropriate additional funds to the Department of Developmental Services to stabilize and recover from the ongoing pandemic.

The staffing crisis as a result of the pandemic has made it hard to recruit and retain Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) due to low starting wages and pandemic burnout. I urge the appropriations committee to support an increase in funding to provide fair and adequate wages to ensure the continuity of services.

Unfortunately, any incremental wage increase provided in the last biennium budget has been nullified due to inflation. Additionally, we are facing a competitive job market where individuals can start at higher wages, with less responsibility.

Because of these factors, it is not uncommon for individuals to not show up for interviews, or complete our orientation/onboarding as other opportunities with higher starting wages and benefits become available. This process is very costly for us and ties up valuable resources – something we simply cannot afford.

MARC, Inc. of Manchester is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization that supports people with developmental disabilities from Ashford, Bloomfield, Columbia, Coventry, East Hartford, Ellington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Manchester, Mansfield Depot, New Britain, Newington, South Glastonbury, South Windsor, Stafford Springs, Vernon/Rockville, West Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor.

Our staff deserve higher wages to match the responsibilities & skill sets required to work in our field. There is a difference between working at a “big box” retail store for \$16.50 per hour and our agency for the same amount. There needs to be a difference between minimum wage and the wages offered as a Direct Support Professional. The health and safety of the individuals supported require it. Their families depend on it.

In addition, funds are needed to address wage compression issues that occur when adjusting starting wages for any organization.

Finally, I know the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of everyone over the past two years. I hope that the legislature and this committee, in particular, will include people with intellectual & developmental disabilities as part of the statewide discussion on how to address this issue.

I am hopeful that funds received by the American Rescue & Recovery Act along with other State funding will provide the resources needed to address the items covered in my testimony.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectively Submitted,

Kevin Zingler  
MARC, Inc. of Manchester  
151 Sheldon Road  
Manchester, CT 06042  
(860) 646-5718 / [kzingler@marcct.org](mailto:kzingler@marcct.org)  
[www.marcct.org](http://www.marcct.org)

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A UNITED WAY AGENCY SERVING MANCHESTER AND THE SURROUNDING AREA